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SUBJECT: Senegal's ruling party steals local election in Mbane

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The Court of Appeals in Dakar recently overturned the results of local elections in Mbane located in Northeast Senegal. A leading opposition leader Aliou Diack has been officially replaced by a member of the ruling party following the court's decision. Although the court has justified its verdict citing voter intimidation, opposition leaders believe it is a ploy to cover-up the implication of ruling party members in illicit land deals. The situation in Mbane remains tense as local opinion remains highly opposed to the court's decision. The opposition has taken the step of challenging these results in the Supreme Court. End Summary.

Voter Intimidation or Fabrication

2. (SBU) After only three months in power, Bennoo opposition leader Aliou Diack has been officially replaced by a member of the ruling SOPI party coalition, Mamadou Cire Diallo. The Court of Appeals based in Dakar reached this decision based on alleged voter intimidation in five rural villages. The cancellation of results has allowed the ruling party to claim victory in the highly coveted constituency. No polling station irregularities were reported during the March 22 local elections from opposition or ruling party representatives. When results were officially declared however, the defeated ruling party candidate for Mbane took the case to court saying, "It has been reported to us that a lack of security in the polling stations in Ndombo resulted in storming of a polling station and many voters being deprived access to their voting precincts."

The Plot Thickens

3. (SBU) The ruling parties (SOPI) application to the court requested for new elections to be held within those five villages. The court however, ultimately provided them with much more than they had demanded by overturning 1,023 opposition votes (Bennoo) against 197 votes for the ruling coalition (SOPI). This court decision also went against a memorandum produced by the Ministry of Interior (organizer of elections in Senegal) who stated that "The alleged insecurity that might have prevented voters to exercise their rights is not proven. And considering that voting is not mandatory in Senegal, no candidate can deem that they have sustained a prejudice resulting from this situation."

Secret Land Deal

4. (SBU) The court decision seems to have been motivated by the desire of senior GOS official's interested in having a local government which protects their own interest. The ousted opposition official Aliou Diack had begun the process of reviewing all land allocation deals within the district. Since coming to power in 2000, the ruling coalition is alleged to have lavishly doled out large plots of land to senior leaders of the ruling party, including senior civil servants in the military and legal system.

The Alleged Cover-up

15. (SBU) During one of its first meetings the opposition council decided to cancel the allocation of 20,000 hectares of land to a obscure bio-fuel company named "Plantation Vert" (Green plantation). Allegations have surfaced that President Wade himself is the owner of the company. Mbane's ruling party leaders have also allegedly allocated more land than is available in the community. Between 2000 and this year, over 202,000 hectares had been allocated in Mbane which is 42,000 more then the total within the district.

All the President's Men

16. (SBU) The list of alleged beneficiaries includes the Prime Minister, Souleymane Ndiaye, Zacharia Diaw (President Wade's Cabinet Director), President of the Senate Papa Diop and several other prominent GOS officials; including Abdoulaye Fall, head of the National Gendarmerie. The head of the departmental court of Dganana, Judge Madicke Diop who has played a key role as chair of the local electoral committee, is also one of the beneficiaries. Leading opposition parties have continued to challenge the decision and have appealed to the Supreme Court.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) The situation in Mbane remains rather tense as the opposition fights to have the court decision overturned. The ruling SOPI coalition appears to have succeeded in rigging the election in its favor. Until the appeal goes through and a final

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court decision is made the situation will continue to be volatile.
END COMMENT.
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